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Introduction

People with similar backgrounds and life experiences often interact in similar ways and have similar expectations of the behavior of others. How people view the world and how they view certain behaviors is influenced by where they grew up, their gender, age, religion and even when they were born.



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Diversity

In State government, we routinely deal with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures whether they are co-workers, suppliers, or our agency's customers or clients. It is important for all of us to recognize that what is acceptable and routine to us, may not be to people whose backgrounds and life experiences are different from our own.

After completing this course, you will better understand why it's important to include people with characteristics, cultures, backgrounds, and behavioral expectations that may be different from your own. We call these differences DIVERSITY.



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Advantages of Diversity

But why is diversity important? Studies show that work groups and organizations that are diverse have better outcomes and are better at meeting the needs of their customers and clients as well as their employees. Diversity facilitates the exchange of ideas which can lead to increased productivity, innovation and employee satisfaction. In a workplace that values diversity, "all individuals are treated fairly, respectfully and have equal access to opportunities and resources and can contribute fully to the organization's success." *

Let's explore diversity further.

**Society for Human Resources Management*



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Chapter Summary: Introduction

This completes the Introduction chapter. The next chapter describes diversity in the workplace.

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Understanding Diversity

Diversity refers to characteristics, human qualities, and experiences that are different from our own. It is important to understand how these differences shape people. This section explores diversity from two perspectives: cultural and generational.



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Our Unique Cultures

All of us have unique cultural backgrounds that influence and shape our perspectives. These influences can impact our behavior and attitudes; for example, when to smile, when to shake hands and how to deal with conflict. Examples of unique cultural influences include

- Ethnicity
- Race
- Religion
- Education
- Work
- Parents (Family Upbringing)



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Our Unique Cultures (continued)

Some personal aspects we can control and change, others are out of our control. The following are some examples of those that influence our cultural perspectives.

Click each row to view what you can and can't change.

	I can't change	I can change
Age		
Habits		
Education		
Work		
Race		
Status		
Ethnicity		
Appearance		
Past		



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Our Unique Cultures (continued)

Our culture also shapes our behavior and attitudes. It is important to recognize that other cultures can have very different perspectives than our own.

Click on each aspect below to see some differences between the typical United States culture and some other cultures.

Aspects of Culture	Typical U.S. Culture	Some Other Cultures
Sense of self and space		
Communication and language		
Time and time consciousness		
Relationships, family, and friends		
Work habits and practices		

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Generational Differences

Our behavior and attitudes can also be influenced by the norms of "our times." While all generations value many, if not most, of the same things, there are also unique generational differences.

Click each generation to view their values.

Traditionalist

Baby Boomer

Generation X

Generation Y
(Millennials)



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Generational Differences (continued)

While these generational differences can help us recognize some differences between ourselves and others, we must remember that each person is a unique individual. A co-worker may have characteristics similar to those of his/her generation or may have characteristics that are completely different. In addition, there are core similarities among the generations and among cultures, such as

- Integrity
- Achievement
- Love
- Competence
- Happiness
- Self respect
- Wisdom
- Balance
- Responsibility
- Family



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Respecting Differences

Individuals have a tendency to view others as different from themselves, and neglect understanding how different they may be from another's perspective. Since each of us is shaped by unique circumstances, some which we can control and others we can't control, it's not only important to understand these differences, but also to respect them. By appreciating and understanding cultural differences and similarities, individuals can become culturally competent.



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Chapter Summary: Understanding Diversity

This completes the Understanding Diversity chapter. The next chapter discusses how to be culturally competent.

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Cultural Competency

Cultural competency refers to one's ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between different groups. Competence is indicated by

- Acceptance and respect of cultural differences
- Continual expansion of cultural knowledge
- Continued cultural self-assessment
- Attention to the dynamics of cultural differences
- Adoption of culturally relevant interaction and service



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Embracing Diversity

Our attitudes and perceptions can influence our assumptions of others. We sometimes generalize assumptions based on our opinions, feelings and preferences. For example, we may say, "Those engineers are too noisy;" instead of "I'm having difficulty concentrating when so many people are talking at once."

Misunderstandings, assumptions, and generalizations can lead to exclusion of others. The goal of cultural competency is to be inclusive of others who may be culturally different from us. The following section describes the benefits of being inclusive of others as well as improper and inadequate methods of dealing with diversity.



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Excluding

Excluding is leaving out others or preventing interaction with one's own group. When people are excluded, they're denied the benefits the larger group takes for granted. An example of excluding is not inviting a co-worker to a team lunch because of his/her unique political views.



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Tolerating

Tolerating is acknowledging another's cultural differences, but tolerating does not necessarily mean acceptance of the differences and does not contribute to diversity. An example of tolerating is passively rejecting a co-worker's ideas, because you disagree, by never responding to his/her suggestions.



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Building

Building relationships is intentionally understanding, valuing, and managing cultural differences. For example, an employee builds diversity by listening and considering the value of differing opinions from co-workers, even though he/she may initially disagree or feel uncomfortable.



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Including

Including goes beyond merely building relationships. It's the process of engaging all types of people in a team and/or group by recognizing differences as an **asset** for achieving high productivity. For example, an employee is culturally competent when he/she actively seeks diverse opinions when making important decisions.



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Benefits of Inclusion

The ultimate goal of cultural competency is inclusion. When we include others regardless of their cultural background, everyone feels safe to reach out to others for help, contribute their own ideas and make decisions. The following are benefits of inclusion:

- Develops outstanding teams through better working relationships among diverse employees
- Creates synergy among employees and boosts morale
- Creates awareness that will have a positive impact on the work environment
- Promotes higher productivity
- Creates ideas for decision-making and problem-solving



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Knowledge Check

Consider the following:

Gerry supervises three employees: Jill, Steve, and Mark. Steve is much younger than Gerry and has complained that the department's highly team-oriented approach is ineffective. Steve wants more autonomy. Gerry insists that team-work is the only way to succeed and allowing employees to work on their own only creates division. To prove his point, Gerry stops inviting Steve to team meetings.

What type of behavior is Gerry exhibiting?

- ☐ **Building**
- ☐ **Excluding**

Submit Answer

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Knowledge Check (continued)

Consider the following:

Henry is a self-proclaimed techno-junky. He prefers text messaging, emailing, and online discussion boards over face-to-face conversations. His co-worker Vicky, however, does not feel comfortable with virtual communication. She prefers face-to-face. Henry has become frustrated with Vicky because although she replies to his emails and texts, her responses are usually very brief - one or two sentences. Henry often has to walk over to Vicky's work area to get important information from Vicky.

What type of behavior is Vicky exhibiting?

- ☐ Including
- ☐ Tolerating

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Chapter Summary: Cultural Competency

This completes the Cultural Competency chapter. The next chapter discusses best practices for promoting diversity in the workplace.

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Best Practices

The challenge for us is to leverage diverse perspectives and viewpoints for the betterment of our work teams, services, and products. The following section covers four best practices to create a diverse and inclusive workplace:

- Respect differences
- Encourage teamwork
- Communicate effectively
- Build relationships



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Respect Differences

It's easy and human to make judgments about people's differences. The issue is not the comparison but the tendency to view others in a less favorable light. Our responsibility is to avoid making generalizations and assumptions about others. Respect differences in others and avoid placing their values in a lesser light than our own. Respecting diversity in others requires the following:

- Understand that people are shaped by their unique influences
- Be aware of things a person cannot change
- Respect the rights and values of others, even when you have a different perspective
- Treat others the way you expect to be treated



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Encourage Teamwork

A team benefits when diverse perspectives are included in problem solving. The following are strategies for promoting diverse teamwork.

- **How we view work** - We all view work differently. For example, some people emphasize the greater good as more important than individual pursuits, and relationships are valued over tasks, data, and knowledge. To help overcome differences, allow time for trust to develop among team members before the actual work begins. Once trust is established, employees often nurture and attempt to protect relationships.
- **How we share information** - Communication differences can impact team cohesion. For example, some people communicate indirectly - implying problems rather than stating them outright. It is important that team members probe when someone's comments are vague. This should be done in a non-threatening way.
- **How we view time** - Some people view time as limited, linear, and sequential. They concentrate on one task at a time; however, others tend to think of time as abundant, systemic and holistic. They multi-task. It's important to focus on work deadlines rather than personal styles of time management. Allow for differences in how people achieve their goals.

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Communicate Effectively

Being a good communicator involves taking the time to learn about your coworkers' and customers' communication norms. Adjusting to communication differences helps foster trust and respect.

Click on the following for examples of communication differences:

Touch

Degree of directness

Appropriateness of subject

Space

Silence

Loudness and pitch

Facial expressions

Eye contact

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Build Relationships

All of us need to demonstrate our commitment to diversity through the use of inclusion strategies to remove barriers and include others. We build relationships by getting out of our comfort zones and traditional networks and reaching out to those who have different perspectives from us. In order to **BUILD** diverse relationships, we must



- **B**e open to another's viewpoint and opinion
- **U**nderstand others' perspectives so you can accept a viewpoint that may be different than yours
- **I**nitiate discussions and contacts with others who are different from you
- **L**isten and learn from one another
- **D**iscard old biases toward certain groups or types of people

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Knowledge Check

Kelly and Mark often work together on team projects. Kelly is quiet and doesn't like to voice opinions or enter into debates. Mark, on the other hand, is "loud" and easily expresses ideas. Kelly considers this obnoxious and sometimes rude. Sometimes Kelly resents Mark's assertive behavior and feels stepped on in team meetings.

How can this be resolved?

- ☐ **Mark should refrain from voicing his opinion**
- ☐ **Kelly should ignore Mark's assertive behavior**
- ☐ **Mark and the team leader should respectfully urge Kelly to express her opinion**

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Knowledge Check (continued)

Thomas and Jeff work in a department that always has multiple projects occurring at any given time. Both men work closely since their skill sets are similar; however, Jeff likes to work on one project at a time until it is completed. This annoys Thomas because he works on several projects at once. Both employees meet their deadlines, but there has been tension regarding these work differences.

How can this be resolved?

- ☐ **Thomas needs to realize and accept that both methods of work can be effective as long as it doesn't hinder the functioning of the team or deadlines.**
- ☐ **This clearly hinders teamwork and Jeff needs to change his work method.**
- ☐ **Thomas' frustration is natural. As long as he hides it, he's fine.**

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Be Proactive

To realize the benefits of diversity, and to avoid discrimination based on diverse differences, it's critical that we actively embrace diversity in the workplace. Instead of simply tolerating differences, we need to understand differences. We need to purposefully include people in our own groups who have diverse backgrounds and perspectives. We need to improve our understanding and avoid any attitude or behavior that causes divisions based on differences. Diversity is an asset and we don't want to miss the opportunity.



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